

# **The Right Stuff**

## **Re-Integration and Adaptation Families of Vietnam Era Prisoners of War**

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# Medical Care and Study of POW's and their Families

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- 1972-1978: Center for Prisoner of War Studies at Naval Health Research Center, San Diego
- 1978-1997: Data Collection and Medical Follow-Up at Naval Operational Medicine Institute (NOMI), Pensacola
- 1998: Establishment of The Robert E. Mitchell Center for Prisoner of War Studies, NOMI

# **Dynamics of Captivity and Waiting**

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- Captive POW's and waiting families experienced parallel stages of adjustment
- Followed Kubler-Ross's Stages of Grief
- Both grieving loss of life as they knew it
- Encountered new circumstances with significant hardships.
- Paradox of grief resolution in context of long term re-adjustment

# Reunion of the POW and Family

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- Operation Homecoming--567 POW's repatriated in 1973
- Planned for years, but had short notice on execution
- Update POW's on family changes during years of captivity
- Not all news was good



# The Longitudinal POW Study and Comparison Group

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- 102 of 138 RPOW's participated in the longitudinal family study
- NOMI developed a comparison group comprised of 138 matched aviators and 102 families
- RPOW Study is now in 26th year
- Family data collected 1975-1978

# **POW's and Families After First Year of Reunion**

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- Nearly 30% of married families were divorced by end of first year
- Major adjustment to wife's increased independence and new roles
- Husband trying to find place in re-united family
- Re-adjustment occurred in context of great social changes in family roles

# Long Term Reintegration of the Repatriated POW and Family

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- 50% still married at 5th year post
- Few differences between POW families and comparison group in family functioning measures by 3rd year
- Bi-modal families (children pre and post captivity)
- Many POW wives occupationally delayed by single parenting

# Long Term Marital Stability of the Repatriated POW and Family

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- Higher rate in first year after return--delay effect
- Lower rate over next 14 years (1974-1987)
- Trend Lines merged in 1987
- Slightly higher rate 1988-1993
- 1998 data collection will allow 25 year rate comparison



# Effects of Captivity on RPOW Family Adaptation

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- Comparison of Naval Aviator POW's with Control Group showed no significant differences on family measures
- However, comparison with families of Army POW's showed larger variability among Army POW's and higher levels of stress in response to life changes.
- Explanation?

# “The Right Stuff”

## ■ Demographics

- Older at time of captivity
- Higher rank/career orientation
- Married longer

## ■ Selection

- Naval OCS
- Flight training
- Successful carrier landings
- Combat and Survivors

## ■ Training

- SERE School

# Selection and Training Factors

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- Role of anxiety and dissociation in survival of POW's—Dr. Jeff Moore
- Role of cortisol in predicting dissociation and failure in SERE School—Dr. Andy Morgan
- Navy POW's and controls experienced rigorous selection process to be those least traumatized by long term captivity
- Army POW's younger, enlisted, drafted

# Structural Modeling of Family Adaptation

- Observed variables consolidated into latent variables by factor analysis
- Five factors emerged from analysis:
  - Marital Support
  - Family Events and Reactivity
  - Structural Supports
  - Coherence and Meaning
  - Family Adaptation
- This model explains 72.45% of the variance in the model (Error variance = 27.55%)



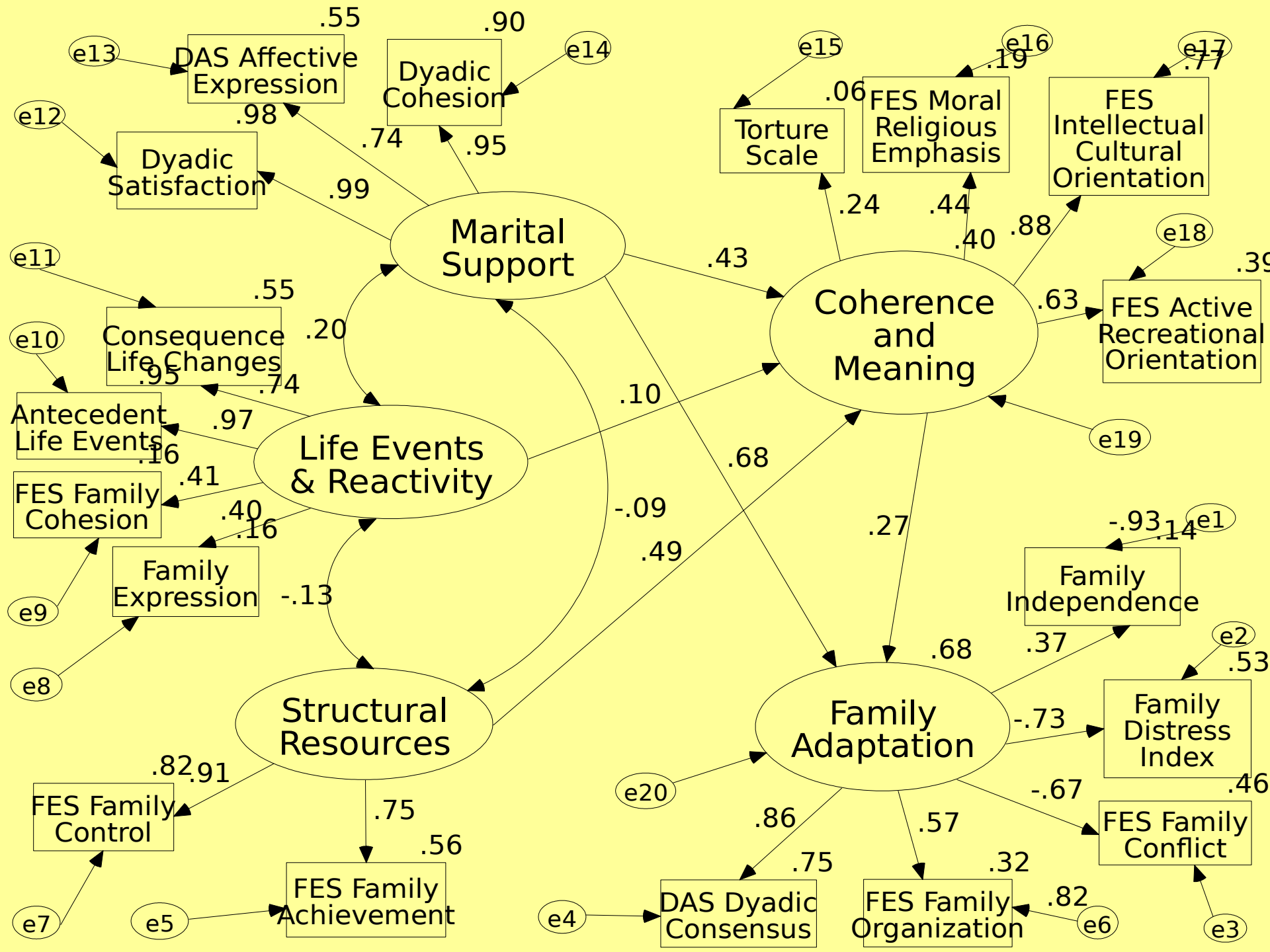
# Structural Modeling of Family Adaptation

- AMOS 4.0 used to develop Structural Equation Model using factors as latent variables
- McCubbin and Patterson's Double ABCX Theory of family resilience and adaptation used to develop path models
- Eight different models tested
- Single identified model emerged which merged theoretical and statistical clarity

# Structural Model of RPOW Family Adaptation

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- Covariance arrows similar to correlation among predictor variables
- Product Moments describe relationship strength and influence among latent variables—similar to “Beta” in Multiple Regression Equations
- Next slide is busy.....



# **Lessons Learned about Families of Prisoners of War**

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- Preparation of family for all possibilities
- Couples who prepare better fare better
- Family sponsor or POC is critical
- First few weeks after capture are critical
- Families in similar situation are helpful
- Grieving process must be facilitated
- Family Assistance Hotline



# **Lessons Learned about Families of Prisoners of War**

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- Provide maximum information to family
- Brief family prior to reunion
- Prepare family for media attention
- Repatriation plans need to be flexible
- Resolve MIA status promptly
- Families must be part of homecoming
- Brief RPOW's accurately and soon

# **Lessons Learned about Families of Prisoners of War**

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- Caution families that re-integration takes time: un-grieving process
- Families will need continuing support
- Multi-finality of outcomes: some families were strengthened by captivity

# **Further Research with Families of Prisoners of War**

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- Dissociation Effects on Torture Recall
- Resilience factors 25 years later
- Adult Children of RPOW's

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# Questions?